President Putin. As you know, this is not our first meeting, between myself and President Clinton. President Clinton, now for almost 8 years, heads one of the most powerful countries in the world. He's a very experienced politician. In my mind, we've established now not only good business ties but also personal relations. For me, President Clinton is a person who is a very comfortable and pleasant partner in negotiations.

I think that if everyone behaves the way President Clinton has behaved, not trying to find dead ends and problems but to seek ways of moving ahead, I think, between us in the future our relations really will be successful. Take a look at the ABM Treaty. There are a lot of problems there. We've written down in our statement, about which Mr. Clinton just spoke, a basis, a principle of basis for maintaining the ABM Treaty as a major key point in the whole strategic balance and for maintaining security.

Now, the starting point for the possibility of seeing new threats arrive, we have a commonality. We're against having a cure which is worse than the disease. We understand that there are ways and a basis that we can build upon in order to solve even this issue, an issue which seems to be one of the most difficult to solve.

So I repeat, we know that today, in the United States, there is a campaign ongoing. We're familiar with the programs of the two main candidates. And if these programs are implemented, and there it says, for instance, the necessity to positively improve relations between Russia and the United States, the time that Mr. Clinton is going to pass on to the next President, no matter who gets to be President, we're willing to go forward on either one of these approaches.

Thank you.

President Clinton. Well, let me say first, I think President Putin has an enormous opportunity and a great challenge. If you want to know what my personal assessment is, I think he is fully capable of building a prosperous, strong Russia, while preserving freedom and pluralism and the rule of law. It's a big challenge. I think he is fully capable of doing it.

And I want to use the time I have remaining as President not only to further the interests of the United States in meeting our national security threat but also to further our interest in having a good, stable relationship with a Russia that is strong and prosperous and free, respecting pluralism and the rule of law. That's what I'm trying to do. I think he is fully capable of achieving that. And I'm encouraged by the first 2 days of our really serious work.

NOTE: The President's 191st news conference began at 6:55 p.m. in St. George's Hall in the Kremlin. In his remarks, he referred to former President Boris Yeltsin and current Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov of Russia. President Putin and some reporters spoke in Russian, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Interview With Aleksei Venediktov of Ekho Moskvy Radio in Moscow

June 4, 2000

Mr. Venediktov. Good evening. Today we have a guest, the President of the United States of America. Good evening, Mr. President.

The President. Good evening.

Russia-U.S. Relations

Mr. Venediktov. Right off the bat, I'd like to say that today we've already had a press conference, which our listeners could see you, and so for that reason, my questions will not be political in nature. Mostly listeners will be asking their questions.

My first question is as follows, Mr. President. The latest public opinion poll in Russia by the Institute of—[*inaudible*]—had found that 11 percent of Russians see an enemy in the United States. Another 11 percent of Russians do not know how to answer this question. And 78 percent of Russians believe that Russia is more of a friend, rather than an enemy. I would ask you, since just the ordinary people say this, as to the other 22 percent who feel that Russia is either an enemy or do not know how to answer the question, what would you be able to say directly to those people who are now listening to you and watching you?

The President. Well, first I would say the 78 percent are right. And I would say that the United States has tried to be a friend

to Russia and to democracy, prosperity, and strength in Russia.

I have worked hard to help support Russian democracy, Russian economic reform, and a large role for Russia in the world. I supported Russia coming into the G–8, to the Asian-Pacific economic leaders group; having a special partnership with NATO; working on the ground, our troops, Russian troops, side by side in the Balkans. And I intend to support Russia's effort to get a program going with the International Monetary Fund, with the World Bank. I believe the world needs a strong and prosperous and democratic Russia that respects the rule of law and the differences among its people. And that's what I've worked for.

So I have tried to be a good friend. And I think America wants friendly relations. The American people basically like the Russian people, and they feel better when they think we have good relations and that we have a good future together.

Mr. Venediktov. I believe, Mr. President, you are mistaken, because right in front of me is a Gallup poll from the United States, March of the year 2000, and the "positive" attitude towards Russia, or "mostly positive," is only 40 percent of the American population; and "mostly negative" or "very negative" is 59 percent answers of the Americans who were polled. How could you explain to the Russians now why Americans, a significant part of the citizens, are negative towards United States? * Is it fear? Is it unhappiness? Are they angry, or what?

The President. I think it overwhelmingly is the opinion of the American people, and most people in the West, about the situation in Chechnya and the highly publicized other differences we have. But I think if you ask the American people another question, "Would you like to see a good American relationship with a strong, prosperous, democratic Russia?"—they would say yes. And if you talk to the American people that have actually known Russians and you ask them, "Do you like the Russian people?" overwhelmingly, they would say yes.

*White House correction.

Joint Anti-Ballistic Missile System

Mr. Venediktov. I am finished with asking my questions, Mr. President. Now let's go to the questions that ordinary people have asked. Some questions came over the Internet—[*inaudible*]—from St. Petersburg—[*inaudible*]—from Moscow—and they basically all ask the same question. "Why don't you want, together with Mr. Putin, together with Russia, to create a joint system of national anti-ballistic missile system? Why have not you accepted this proposal of"—these questions came before the press conference, but it does increase the fear among those people, doesn't it?

The President. Well, let me explain the issue here. And I don't want to take too long on any questions, because we want to answer as many as possible, but this is very important.

First of all, I have no objection to working with Russia on a joint missile defense that would intercept a missile directed at Russia or the United States from a hostile power in the Middle East or anywhere else, in the so-called boost phase. I have no objection to doing that. I think we should work together on it. The problem is, we think it will take 10 years or more to develop; the technology is not yet available.

Now, by contrast, we expect to face this threat in the United States within 5 years, and we think the other technology for the limited national missile defense will be available within that time. So that's why I haven't agreed to scrap what seems to be a clear way of defending our country for an unclear way. But I think it's important that the Russian people and the American people understand the exact nature of the dispute here.

Mr. Venediktov. But it frightens Russians, obviously.

The President. Yes, I understand. But I think they won't be frightened if they understand the exact nature of the difference, even if we can't resolve the difference.

The Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty of 1972 enshrined a theory of our security—that is, Russian security and American security—based on strategic stability and mutual deterrence. That is, we would never have so many defensive weapons, and we wouldn't have national missile defenses that could interfere

with our offensive weapons, so that neither of us would ever launch nuclear missiles at each other because of that. Okay.

Now, we recognized that things might change and threats might come from other places, even way back then. So there was a possibility of amending the missile defense treaty. Now, we recognize—just today President Putin and I signed a statement of principles that said, "Okay, there is a new threat; the treaty may be able to be amended, but we disagree right now on how to meet the threat." That's what we said.

The narrow issue is this: If the U.S. has a missile defense that can stop a couple of missiles from North Korea, does it have the potential to upset what has kept us safe all these years, which is mutual deterrence and stability? We say, no; they say, the Russians say, it might. So we're trying to work through that.

But the point is, neither side believes the other side is trying to hurt them directly. There is an honest difference of opinion here. And we closed some of the gaps in our two positions, and we promise to keep working on it.

Believe me, I did not want to scrap the ABM Treaty or the theory of mutual deterrence or strategic stability. Both President Putin and I want to reduce the number of offensive missiles but keep the theory that has kept us safe all these years.

Mr. Venediktov. I think it's time to listen to some phone calls. I would like to say to Mr. President that now the Ekho program also is carrying out electronic voting, and at the end of our discussion, we'd like to comment you on what we get. The question that people are voting on is as follows: Will the situation under President Putin improve towards the United States or will it get worse or you don't know? So by the end of the program here we'll get some results.

U.S. Economic Issues

Hello, this is the first call. Please, what is your question to President Clinton? "Do you think financial crisis is possible in the United States? Thank you. I guess the Russian crisis does not bother you, is not a concern to you. What about America? Is there an economic crisis possible in the United States?"

The President. Well, first of all, the Russian condition does concern me. I think when the Russian economy is healthier, the American economy will be healthier. And I intend to support the economic reform program that the President and the Prime Minister have outlined.

I think a financial crisis is unlikely in the United States, as long as we have a good economic program, as long as we keep our budget in surplus, as long as we're continuing to open our markets and compete with other countries, and as long as we're investing in our people. If we have good policies and we work hard, I think a big financial crisis is unlikely.

Political Satire

Mr. Venediktov. The next phone call. "Have you ever seen the puppets program? Have you seen your own puppet? And how do you relate to the fact that there is a program such as this that lampoons Presidents?"

The President. I haven't seen it. Perhaps I can get it on tape and watch it; I would like to see it. But it doesn't bother me. I have been lampooned in America a lot. There is almost nothing anybody can say to make fun of me that hasn't been said already. And as long as it's said in good spirit and good humor, I don't mind. I think we need people to make fun of us so we don't take ourselves too seriously. And if it's not said in good spirits, then you just have to ignore it and go to work every day.

Freedom of the Press

Mr. Venediktov. Okay, in that case, I have a question, Mr. President. It seems to me, despite the first amendment of the Constitution, any President of the United States, or Argentina or Russia, any other country, has a desire to kind of squash the press, which is not—that follows you all the time, looks for dirty stories, is always trying to hound you. Have you ever had a desire to shake a journalist real strong? And if you've had such feelings, how did you manage to control them? This is the main question. Of course, it refers to just about any—it could be asked for any President, any leader.

The President. Well, of course, from time to time you read something that you believe is either untrue or unfair, or maybe you're afraid it is true, and you just wish it weren't printed. And you can get angry. But I think the important thing—in our country, for example, if you're a public figure, it's almost impossible to even win a lawsuit against somebody who's deliberately lying about you, because we have bent over backwards in favor of the freedom of the press.

Now, why do we do that? Because we think that democracy is more stable and people are more free when the press is free. And we trust the people to understand if the press is either false or unfair. In other words—particularly in this electronic age, when someone says something about me that's not true, I can go on a program like this, and I can say, here's what they say; here's the truth. I can go on television. I can give a speech.

So what we believe is that even though—if you have a really free press that much freedom can carry with it irresponsibility, you still have more stability in society by letting people be free, by letting the debates unfold, and by trusting that the citizens, the voters, in the end, will get it right.

And we've had this first amendment for over 200 years now. And the press has become more and more and more free. The meaning of it has been broadened. And our country has gotten stronger and stronger. It can become personally painful if someone says something that maybe they shouldn't say, but the society is stronger with a free press. And if you trust the people, then you must believe that if something is said you don't agree with, you go out and disagree. You tell the people your side, and you trust them to make the right decision. That's what I believe gives you the strongest society.

Mr. Venediktov. Have you spoken to President Putin about freedom of the press in Russia?

The President. Yes, we had a discussion about it, and I said in my press conference today—I quoted his statement. President Putin said that without civil society and free press, the Russian democracy couldn't go on. And I think that's a wise statement.

I also believe, though, that this is something that has to be debated and fought for and struggled for. For example, in the beginning of our democracy, around 1800, we had the same Constitution we have today. But there were—people could bring lawsuits against people who printed things in the newspapers, and often win in ways that intimidated them. So we had to keep changing the law to try to preserve the right for totally innocent private citizens to bring suit against people who might use the press to hurt them deliberately and to lie about them deliberately, while still allowing a very broad range for political debate and dispute and dissent.

So we've been working on this a long time. But the trend has always been for more freedom of the press, particularly where public issues and public officials are concerned. And I think it's fair to say that no one in modern history in our country has had either more negative press or more painful press than I have, but I still think on balance as long as you get to answer, the people have a chance to get it right, and you get more stability, because an open press also ensures that all these issues are fully debated and that all sides are fully heard.

So I believe it's an instrument of stability. And if you think it's not free enough here, then what I would urge you to do is to look at the example of America. Read the 200-year history of our country and just work on the issues as they come up. Just keep pushing for more—a broader and broader and broader interpretation of freedom of the press. But as I said, we've been working on it a long time. But it's served us well.

Mr. Venediktov. But you don't necessarily have to expel journalists. To tell you the truth, I have read the memoirs of your former Press Secretary, Mr. Stephanopoulos. You get upset, not do nothing, answer, or just let it go past you. Or you could ask the tax police, for example, to check on the business of CNN, or you could——

The President. Yes, but I never did that. I would never do that. And, first of all, it's now clearly illegal for a President to do that. It's not lawful. If you're mad at somebody, I think the thing to do is to express your anger, blow off steam, and go on about your business. Or even better, control your anger and think of a way to make sure the public

has the impression you believe is the right one.

[*At this point, the program paused for station identification.*]

International Monetary Fund

Mr. Venediktov. You're live on the air, hello? What is your question? "I'd like to ask what kind of influence does the President have on the International Monetary Fund, and why is it not giving us credits? It seems that we have an economic uprise in our economy, and we're not getting any credits from the International Monetary Fund. I'd like to get an answer to this question. Why?"

The President. Well, first of all, the President can have some influence over the International Monetary Fund, but he doesn't run it. All the various contributors to the Fund have some influence. I have focused a lot on trying to reform the IMF, to make sure that its policies and practices meet the real needs of countries for the 21st century.

Secondly, I do support Russia getting a program with the IMF and getting financial help from the IMF—your new President, Mr. Putin, and your new Prime Minister have come up with a very good plan, and when they go before the IMF and ask for financial support, the United States will support them. They're putting the plan together now; they're going to make the presentation. I expect to support it.

Next Administration

Mr. Venediktov. Mr. President, I'd like to check to see how ready you are to quick questions, quick answers, we got over the Internet from Russia, all of Russia. These are private questions. You're a sports person, you know sports—are you ready to answer them?

The President. I'll do my best.

Mr. Venediktov. Mr. President, what kind of slogan would you put on the wall of the Oval Room for the next President?

The President. What should the next President's slogan be? Making the most of our prosperity, meeting the big challenges of the 21st century.

President's Spending Money

Mr. Venediktov. How long has it been since you've held money in your hands, cash?

The President. About an hour.

Mr. Venediktov. What did you buy?

The President. Oh, I didn't buy anything, but I got my—I'm going to dinner after I leave you, and so I brought my money with me. But I try to go out and shop every—buy something every few months, anyway, just so I keep in touch with people. And I talk to people in bookstores, or I go buy something for my wife or my daughter, just to see what things cost and see what people are doing. I think it's important that Presidents not get too isolated.

Mr. Venediktov. A favorite question that we always ask on our radio station programs, Mr. President, do you remember how you made your first dollar, earned your first dollar, and how did you spend it?

The President. Well, I remember how I made it; I don't remember how I spent it. The first thing I did to earn money was cutting lawns and cutting hedges and taking care of the yards of the people who lived in my neighborhood. And I was probably about 9 or 10 years old when I did that.

In my lifetime, I probably had earned money doing 20 or 25 different things. I've built houses. I've cleared land. I've worked in a grocery store. I had a news comic book business. Obviously, I was a musician. I made money as a musician. I've been a teacher. I've done a lot of different things in my life.

Personal Transportation

Mr. Venediktov. This is a question from the city of—[*inaudible*]. "Mr. President, do you know how to drive a car, an airplane, a submarine, tank?" Maybe President Putin has inspired this question.

The President. Yes, to the car, although I haven't driven one in a while. And, no, to the airplane. I have taken off and landed a small plane—25 years ago my wife gave me airplane lessons—but I never pursued it. I never got my pilot's license. And I have never—the submarine—I've ridden in a tank, but I've never driven a tank or guided a submarine.

President's Family

Mr. Venediktov. Going back to the telephone questions, here's another question

from the Internet. "What do you value in this life most of all?"

The President. My family, in this life.

Post-Cold-War Russia

Mr. Venediktov. There will be other questions about your wife and your daughter. And now back to the telephones. Your question, please? Hello? You're live on the air. The question is as follows: In 1995 Mr. President spoke at a meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. And he very highly praised the role of the United States in the ideological efforts to make the Soviet Union fall apart. And the question was said about disassembling Russia, the falling apart of the military complex, and creating regimes in these republics, which we need, as he said. And so the question: How can you comment on that statement that you made at that time?

The President. Well, first of all, I wish I had exactly the words before me. But if I said that I thought the United States and its allies in the cold war, by staying strong, hastened the end of communism and the end of the Soviet Union and the liberation of all these various states and the rise of democracy—I believed that then; I still believe that.

But that does not mean that I think Russia should be weak. I want Russia to be strong. I have worked for 8 years for a strong Russia. I want Russia to be strong and prosperous. But I also want it to be democratic, to respect the differences of its people—religious, ethnic, and otherwise—and to be governed by the rule of law.

But I do not want a weak Russia. I want Russia to be strong. And I also want Russia, as I said just a couple of days ago in Germany, to have the ability to be fully part of all major international institutions and have its full say there.

Russia's World Status

Mr. Venediktov. And in this connection, there is a question. "Mr. President, could you frankly say for the United States today, is Russia a country of the Third World, a developing nation?"

The President. No. No. Russia was badly hurt by the recent economic crisis and by some problems in the transition from a command-and-control Communist economy to a market economy. You know the problems as well as I do. But it is a country with a vast and impressive array of science and technology achievements, incredibly well-educated people, and the capacity, I believe, to see a big growth in per capita income very quickly.

So it's not fair to say that Russia is a developing or Third World country. It is fair to say, I think, that the incomes of the Russian people are far below where they should be and far below where they will be if the new government implements serious economic reforms and investors from around the world have confidence that their money will be treated in an appropriate way. I think you will see a large growth in jobs and incomes here, because your people are immensely talented. I think you've got good years ahead of you.

Mr. Venediktov. Since we don't have much time left, I would like to once again ask a quick-style question and expect that you could answer quickly. These, like I said, are private questions, private nature, from our listeners. Here's a question from one of our listeners—[*inaudible*]—who does the Soviet program, they're continuing a live broadcast of this show—maybe you remember, he set up an interview with you——

The President. Yes, he did.

First Lady's Political Future

Mr. Venediktov. "Some say the political career of Hillary Clinton will be so successful that she will become the President of the United States of America. Who knows? Are you ready to return to the White House as a husband of the President, being sort of the First Mister? How do you look at it?" [*Laughter*]

The President. Well, let me say, first of all, I'm very proud of my wife for running for the Senate. She's running hard, and I think she'll win. And she's promised to serve her full term. Now, when she finishes that service, if she wants to continue in public life, I'll support her any way I can.

But I expect that the Vice President, Al Gore, will be elected President. And I expect he'll run for reelection. And after that, who knows what will happen? But I'll say that I'm

very proud of my wife, and I'm going to support her political career any way I can. And I'm going to try to be a good citizen in any way that I can, both of my country and of the world, when I leave office.

Chelsea Clinton

Mr. Venediktov. Mr. President, are you happy with your daughter, how she's studying, how she relates to her relatives, to her parents?

The President. Well, I think when you become the parent of a young man or a young woman, you're always happy when they still want to be around you and spend some time with you. So I'm very happy with her. I'm very proud of her, and I love her very much.

Mr. Venediktov. A Moscow student asks you to convey his greetings to her, and says that the growing generation will correct your mistakes—he and she will improve the mistakes of their parents.

The President. I certainly hope so. I certainly hope so. That's what's supposed to happen in life.

President's View of Russia

Mr. Venediktov. And the last question—I'm asking this one. It's a poll, and I would like for you to comment on the results. Just before your visit, there were questions raised about you—not just about America but you, yourself. What do you think about Russia? That was a question to the Russians. I think the public have come up with very interesting results. One-third, exactly, feels that you, personally—you, not America but you, personally—feel that you're a positively disposed towards America. One-third, exactly, thinks that you are ill-disposed. And one-third thinks that they cannot answer this question. I would like Mr. President, by the end of our discussion agree to say something to the people who have doubts in you.

The President. Well, I think that I made it clear that I'm positively disposed toward Russia, but I understand why a third would question that. That is—why would you question that? Well, because we had differences between the United States and Russia over Bosnia, Kosovo, Chechnya.

Mr. Venediktov. By the way, there were many questions on Kosovo.

The President. Yes, yes.

Mr. Venediktov. Do you agree with the fact that there was a mistake made?

The President. So we had differences. But I would like to ask you to consider on the other side—I led the way in supporting Russia's entry into the G–8 organization, the prestigious international organization, into the Asian-Pacific leaders organization, into the special partnership agreement with NATO. I have supported every effort to help Russia economically. I have been here five times. No American President has ever been here five times to Moscow. I wouldn't be surprised if no American President ever comes here five times again.

I first came to this city in 1969 when I was 23 years old. And I have been favorably disposed toward Russia and the Russian people ever since—notwithstanding our disagreements, even during the cold war.

And one of the things that I have always tried to do is to help support a free, prosperous, strong Russia that is fully integrated into the international institutions and the Western institutions, so that tomorrow and in all of the tomorrows to come, you will be a great nation. But greatness will be defined not by the dominance of your neighbors but by the dominance of the achievement of your people and the power of your partnerships with other countries. That's what I want, and I've worked very hard for it.

But I am extremely favorably disposed toward the people of Russia. And I am extremely optimistic about the future partnerships between the United States and Russia.

Mr. Venediktov. I thank you, Mr. President, for coming here. Of course, many questions have been left unasked. And I hope that after you return, after your term of office has ended, return back to Russia, perhaps even before that, you will be able to come back to the studio again, because I have many other questions. If you would allow, I would give all these questions to your staff and maybe some of them would interest you.

The President. Yes, do.

President Vladimir Putin of Russia

Mr. Venediktov. The last one. There were 5,000 of them that came in. You see the results. Forty-eight percent of the viewers—[*inaudible*]—believe that the relations between the United States and Russia will improve under Putin. Forty-two percent believe that they will get worse. And the rest don't know. What do you think about this last poll that we just made?

The President. Well, I think that it reflects, first of all, the fact that he's just in office, so people can't know for sure. Secondly, you've got almost 49 percent saying they will, which shows that people appreciate the fact that he's a strong and able man who has been gracious to me in this first meeting of ours in Russia. And then the 42 percent, I think, are focused on the differences we've had and the problems that have been publicized.

The truth is, you can't know for sure. But I think that based on the meeting I had, we've got a better than even chance that our relationship will improve. The relationship between the United States and Russia is profoundly important. It will tend always to be characterized by the disagreements, because they will always get more press coverage, because they will always be more current. But if there is a strong underlying commitment to democracy, to freedom, to mutual prosperity, mutual respect, I think that over time they will get better even if there are disagreements. That's what I believe, and that's what I've worked for.

President's Return to Ekho Moskvy

Mr. Venediktov. Thank you very much, Mr. President. We will be waiting for your return, so that you could answer——

The President. I'd like to come back.

Mr. Venediktov. ——by being in the studio some of the other questions, maybe as a businessman or a lawyer. Thank you very much.

The President. I'd love to come back, because I saw on your wall that the only way I get to sign my picture is if I come twice, you see. So I'd like to come back. And I want to thank all the people who called or who E-mailed in their questions. And I hope you will give me all the questions, and maybe I can write you something about them, too.

NOTE: The interview began at 7:50 p.m. in Ekho Moskvy Studios and was broadcast live. In his remarks, the President referred to Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov of Russia. Mr. Venediktov spoke in Russian, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter. A portion of this interview could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Remarks to the Russian State Duma in Moscow

June 5, 2000

First of all, I thank you for that introduction. And even though it is still in the morning, I am delighted to be here with the Members of the state Duma and the Federation Council.

It is important to me to have this opportunity because the prospects for virtually every important initiative President Putin and I have discussed over the last 2 days will obviously depend upon your advice and your consent, and because through you I can speak to the citizens of Russia directly, those whom you represent.

I have made five trips to Russia in my years as President. I have worked with President Yeltsin and now with President Putin. I have met with the leadership of the Duma on more than one occasion. I have spoken with Russia's religious leaders, with the media, with educators, scientists, and students. I have listened to Russian people tell me about their vision of the future, and I have tried to be quite open about my own vision of the future. I have come here at moments of extraordinary optimism about Russia's march toward prosperity and freedom, and I've been here at moments of great difficulty for you.

I believed very strongly from the first time I came here that Russia's future fundamentally is in the hands of the Russian people. It cannot be determined by others, and it should not be. But Russia's future is very important to others, because it is among the most important journeys the world will witness in my lifetime. A great deal of the 21st century will be strongly influenced by the success of the Russian people in building a